

ABANDONED NEWBORNS / SAFE SURRENDER

On January 1, 2001, California joined only a handful of states by enacting a new law that provides for the health and safety of abandoned newborns. Since that time, more than 40 states have enacted Safe Haven laws.

The Safe Haven law establishes a procedure for voluntary surrender of a child within 72 hours of birth, at a designated location, without risk of arrest or prosecution for child abandonment. The law makes it easier for parents who might otherwise abandon an infant in an unsafe environment.

Distressed parents who are either unable or unwilling to care for a newborn can safely surrender the child within 3 days of birth. All that's required is that the infant be brought to a "safe-surrender" site, which is usually a hospital. An ID bracelet is placed on the infant's ankle and a matching bracelet offered to the parents. These items help connect the parents to the child should they change their mind and want the baby back.



Can only parents bring in a newborn?

No. The law allows any person to bring in an infant as long as that person has lawful custody of the child.

What are the designated "safe-surrender" sites?

"Safe-surrender" sites are located primarily in hospitals. Other locations, such as fire stations, are identified by the Board of Supervisors in each county.

Each site is identified by a posted sign displaying the Safe Haven logo.

Do parents have to provide any information at the "safe-surrender" site?

No. Staff at the site, however, will give parents a medical questionnaire. Although voluntary and not required, the questionnaire can establish a family



history and determine if the child has any special medical needs. (All identifying information about the person who surrenders the infant remains confidential.)

What happens to the infant?

After the baby is taken to a "safe-surrender" site, a coded, confidential bracelet is placed on its ankle. A copy of the bracelet is offered to the parents to make it easier to reclaim the infant. The baby is examined and given medical treatment if needed. Then the baby is placed in a foster or pre-adoptive home.

What if the parents change their minds?

According to the Safe Haven law, parents have at least 14 days to reclaim the baby. They must bring their copy of the coded bracelet back to the "safe-surrender" site. Child Welfare will verify the parents' identities and assess their circumstances and parenting abilities before arranging return of the child.



Important facts to remember about the Safe Haven law:

- Permits parents/surrendering persons to bring an infant, within 3 days of birth, to any “safe-surrender” site in California – legally, confidentially and safely.
- All “safe-surrender” sites can be identified by the Safe Haven logo.
- Protects the person surrendering the infant from arrest or prosecution for child abandonment.
- Does not require that names be given when the infant is surrendered.
- Allows parents/surrendering persons at least 14 days to reclaim the infant.

For more information, visit www.babysafe.ca.gov or contact the Department of Social Services' website at cdss.ca.gov (click on the Safe Haven logo).



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